AMERICAN CIVIC HOLIDAY RESOURCES

THANKSGIVING AND NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

November, as both Native American Heritage Month and the month in which we celebrate Thanksgiving, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which Europeans and Indigenous communities interacted with each other through trade and by sharing ideas and culture.

The texts and artifacts on the following pages highlight the ways in which Europeans along the Eastern seaboard interacted with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which included the Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga and Mohawk nations and later the Tuscarora people as well. The principles which governed the Haudenosaunee Confederacy directly influenced the thinking of the Founding Fathers and provided a model for the Articles of Confederation and the US Constitution.

Source 1: Excerpt from The Peacemaker Story of the Haudenosaunee Nations

Long ago, the Haudenosaunee Nations were at war with each other. A man called the Peacemaker wanted to spread peace and unity throughout Haudenosaunee territory. While on his journey, the Peacemaker came to the house of an Onondaga leader named Hayo'wetha (hi-an-WEN-ta), more commonly known as Hiawatha. Hayo'wetha believed in the message of peace and wanted the Haudenosaunee people to live in a united way. An evil Onondaga leader called Tadadaho, who hated the message of peace, had killed Hayo'wetha's wife and daughters during the violent times. Tadadaho was feared by all; he was perceived as being so evil that his hair was comprised of writhing snakes, symbolizing his twisted mind. The Peacemaker helped Hayo'wetha mourn his loss and ease his pain. Hayo'wetha then traveled with the Peacemaker to help unite the Haudenosaunee.

The Peacemaker used arrows to demonstrate the strength of unity. First, he took a single arrow and broke it in half. Then he took five arrows and tied them together. This group of five arrows could not be broken. The Peacemaker said, "A single arrow is weak and easily broken. A bundle of arrows tied together cannot be broken. This represents the strength of having a confederacy. It is strong and cannot be broken." The Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, and Onondaga accepted the message of peace. With the nations joined together, the Peacemaker and Hayo'wetha sought out Tadadaho. As they approached Tadadaho, he resisted their invitation to join them. The Peacemaker promised Tadadaho that if he accepted the message of peace, Onondaga would be the capital of the Grand Council. Tadadaho finally succumbed to the message of peace. It is said that the messengers of peace combed the snakes from his hair. The name Hayo'wetha means "he who combs," indicating his role in convincing Tadadaho to accept the Great Law of Peace. Joined together, these five nations became known as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Cont. Source 1: Excerpt from The Peacemaker Story of the Haudenosaunee Nations

When peace had successfully been spread among the five nations, the people gathered together to celebrate. They uprooted a white pine tree and threw their weapons into the hole. They replanted the tree on top of the weapons and named it the Tree of Peace, which symbolizes the Great Law of Peace that the Haudenosaunee came to live by. The four main roots of the Tree of Peace represent the four directions and the paths of peace that lead to the heart of Haudenosaunee territory, where all who want to follow the Great Law of Peace are welcome. At the top of the Tree of Peace is an eagle, guardian of the Haudenosaunee and messenger to the Creator.

The Peacemaker then asked each nation to select men to be their leaders called hoyaneh (plural, Hodiyahnehsonh). The Peacemaker gave the laws to the Haudenosaunee men, who formed the Grand Council. The Grand Council, made up of fifty hoyaneh, makes decisions following the principles set forth in the Great Law of Peace. When decisions are made or laws passed, all council members must agree on the issue; this is called consensus.[1]

1. *Haudenosaunee guide for Educators - Smithsonian Institution.* (n.d.). Retrieved November 17, 2022, from https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/HaudenosauneeGuide-2016.pdf

Source 2: Hiawatha Belt[2]

2. *Hiawatha Belt. Onondaga Nation. (2021, February 1). Retrieved November 17, 2022, from https://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/hiawatha-belt/*

Source 3: Letter from Benjamin Franklin to James Parker, 1751

This Union of the Colonies, however necessary, I apprehend is not to be brought about by the Means that have hitherto been used for that Purpose. A Governor of one Colony, who happens from some Circumstances in his own Government, to see the Necessity of such a Union, writes his Sentiments of the Matter to the other Governors, and desires them to recommend it to their respective Assemblies…

A voluntary Union entered into by the Colonies themselves, I think, would be preferable to one imposed by Parliament; for it would be perhaps not much more difficult to procure, and more easy to alter and improve, as Circumstances should require, and Experience direct. It would be a very strange Thing, if six Nations of ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such an Union, and be able to execute it in such a Manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a Dozen English Colonies. [3]

Source 4: Chief Canassatego Speech, Onondaga Nation, 1744

Our wise forefathers established Union and Amity between the Five Nations. This has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring Nations. We are a powerful Confederacy; and by your observing the same methods, our wise forefathers have taken, you will acquire such Strength and power. Therefore whatever befalls you, never fall out with one another. [4]

3. *National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). Founders online: From Benjamin Franklin to James Parker, 20 March 1751. National Archives and Records Administration. Retrieved November 17, 2022, from https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0037*
4. *Neighbors of the onondaga nation.* (n.d.). Retrieved November 17, 2022, from http://www.peacecouncil.net/NOON/articles/government.html

Source 5: The Great Seal of the United States, adopted by the Continental Congress, 1782 [5]

Examining these sources can lead to a rich discussion about the ways in which the early United States government learned from the model of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. On the following page some possible guiding questions. [6]

5. *National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). Original design of the Great Seal of the United States (1782). National Archives and Records Administration. Retrieved November 17, 2022, from https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/original-design-of-the-great-seal-of-the-united-states*

6. Civic Spirit worked with Jenni Rein, a historian and educator at the New York Historical Society, to create these resources as part of our We the Educators Series. To learn more about our We the Educators programming, visit our website: https://civicspirit.org/we-the-educators/.

Guiding Discussion Questions:

- How did the cooperation of the Haudenosaunee influenced the thinking of Benjamin Franklin and the governing principles of the Articles of Confederation?
- What does Franklin's letter teach about how he saw the Indigenious People? How do you think they saw him and his peers?
- How is the ideal of unity represented in the Hiawatha Belt and in the Great Seal of the United States?
- What is the connection between the Great Seal of the United States and the Peacemaker story?